

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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Report title: NW Bicester Apprenticeship Scheme Update	
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the progress of the NW Bicester Apprenticeship Scheme, the concept of which was introduced to the SDB at its meeting in October 2014.

2. Background

- 2.1 Over the past year, the Eco Bicester Project Team has been working with partners to progress a scheme which would allow a sustained programme of apprenticeships to be delivered throughout the construction of the NW Bicester site. In doing this we have been mindful of the Eco Town principles contained in PPS1 and the additional leverage this gives the Council as a planning authority to encourage the development to be economically sustainable.
- 2.2 In addition, it is the scale of the development at NW Bicester which gives us a golden opportunity to devise a scheme which could make a significant impact on the numbers of construction apprenticeships available to young people, both of benefit to them as well as providing the skills needed to support the further growth planned for this area.

3. Key Elements of Scheme

3.1 Overarching Summary

The NW Bicester site will deliver 6000 homes and other mixed use development. The site will come forward via at least 5 outline planning applications and if approved by Cherwell District Council (CDC), will be built out over 25 – 30 years.

The project aims to deliver a sustained programme of a minimum of 300 apprenticeships over the build out period (and potentially beyond), focusing on the construction and related trades initially, but broadening its scope to end users on site. This figure has been confirmed as realistic by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB).

3.2 Setting up a local Oxfordshire-based Apprenticeships Training Agency (ATA)

A key element in the successful delivery of the programme will involve the setting up of a local Oxfordshire-based Apprenticeship Training Agency (ATA). It will be this organisation that will employ apprentices. The ATA will effectively carry all the risk. It will provide the necessary insurances and health and safety training as well as liaising with Oxfordshire Apprenticeships

to access suitable local candidates, liaise with local training providers to secure the appropriate college training and support, and with developers to agree the nature of the apprenticeship and on-site placement timescale.

- 3.3 In essence, the ATA will provide a holistic package for apprentices with the necessary support and training, who will therefore enjoy enhanced opportunities in accessing employment following the conclusion of their apprenticeships.

3.4 Securing the approach through Section 106 Agreements

The idea is that developers of the NW Bicester site will commit to provide a specified minimum number of apprenticeships as part of the S106 agreements attached to any planning consents for the site, based on a CITB estimate of what each application could reasonably yield. The S106 agreement will give preference to Bicester residents and those within a certain radius of Bicester, so that the programme and S106 requirement is reasonably related to the site and local area. However in order to ensure that there is sufficient take up of the apprenticeships, the S106 can contain a “cascade “ approach which allows prospective apprentices to be drawn from a wider area - the District and then wider Oxfordshire.

3.5 Sustainability of approach

This approach involves developing and testing a model - initially for NW Bicester and then to be rolled out in other development sites in Bicester and the wider Cherwell District. Ultimately the intention is that this pilot could be used Oxfordshire wide and with the positive impact of making the ATA self-sustaining over the long term.

4. Latest Progress

- 4.1 The Eco Bicester Team submitted a bid to OxLEP's City Deal Initiative in December 2014 for funding to support the set-up of the ATA and its early operation. The bid was successful and a £50,000 grant has been awarded by OxLEP, subject to the signing of a legal agreement which the Eco Bicester Team are in the processes of negotiating. This is a positive step forward for the initiative as now we have the means to turn the concept into reality.
- 4.2 The aim is to set up the ATA by Summer 2015 so that it can be referred to in future S106 agreements attached to any consents for NW Bicester, as a preferred route to enable developers to deliver apprenticeships. Initial discussions with developers of NW Bicester have been encouraging and have demonstrated an interest and willingness to sign up to the scheme. Regular meetings are being held to progress the initiative with CDC's delivery partners who are: Oxfordshire Apprenticeships, Activate Learning, ACE Training and Oxfordshire County Council. Letters of support for the Bid were also received from Bicester Vision, ACE Training and the CITB.
- 4.3 Particular tasks for the next few months are to commence the work on setting up the ATA and agreeing a process with the CITB to enable them to calculate the number of apprenticeships coming forward from each application. Both these areas of work are currently underway.

5. Anticipated Outcomes

- 5.1 Specifically the goals of the initiative are to:

- create a scheme which is easy and relatively risk-free for the developer to sign up to;
- is cost effective;
- meets the objectives of the participating partners;
- is locally driven and locally delivered;
- increases employer awareness of the benefits of apprenticeship and trainee placements
- provides a top quality educational experience for apprentices with enhanced employment prospects upon conclusion.

- 5.2 However it will be important that the outcomes of this initiative are consistently monitored over its duration - to gauge how effective the programme is and how it might be improved. Appropriate monitoring clauses will be written into the S106 agreement for each outline planning consent which will oblige the developer to provide regular updates on the number and type of apprenticeships being created. As NW Bicester is an Eco Town these clauses will be part of a wider regime of monitoring the development to ensure that lessons are learnt and best practice disseminated more widely.
- 5.3 There will also be scope for CDC to have a positive relationship with the newly set up ATA so that it regularly reports back on the outcomes from the initiative. Specifically it is our intention to put in place arrangements so that the ATA Board of Directors has a wide representation from relevant delivery partners, so that no one organisation dominates. CDC will explore having a place on that Board and would also expect a place to be taken up by a representative of OxLEP if that was felt to be appropriate.
- 5.4 As a guide, CDC will be seeking to secure a minimum of 10 apprenticeships a year from the NW Bicester development (300/10). This is a conservative estimate based on the CITB's initial assessment which looked at the number of apprenticeships generated by the development of the housing on the whole site - it did not include the large areas of commercial development that will also be included in the development mix. Based on what we know about the current build programme for the site, the earliest time for apprenticeships to be delivered would be during towards the end of 2016/2017

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 The Board are asked to note the progress on the delivery of the apprenticeships scheme at NW Bicester.